



Richard Burton: Prince of Players

Michael Munn

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The whirlwind life of one of old Hollywood's biggest stars.

From the depths of a small mining village in Wales to a star of Hollywood's silver screen, Richard Burton broke every rule in his quest for the American Dream. Burton made sure that he sipped the cup of life at its fullest. Twice married to Elizabeth Taylor, he is now revealed to have been one of Marilyn Monroe's secret lovers. The details of these licit and illicit relationships with Hollywood's most iconic stars will titillate and shock both newcomers to Burton's story and those already familiar with his fame. Munn's biography covers everything from Burton's early days on the London stage, to his star performance in Broadway's Camelot, to his wild nights in Hollywood with the likes of Errol Flynn, Peter O'Toole, and Frank Sinatra. Burton was known for his charisma, his explosive temper, his excessive carousing, and, above all, his stunning command of stage and screen. This first-ever look at the real Richard Burton is a must-read for any follower of film, history, and the rise of celebrity in America.

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Richard Burton: Prince of Players Details

Date : Published October 27th 2015 by Skyhorse Publishing, Inc. (first published February 25th 2008)

ISBN :

Author : Michael Munn

Format : Kindle Edition 272 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Plays, Theatre, European Literature, British Literature

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Carolyn says

Appropriately worshipful biography of my all-time favorite actor who was also an extremely kind and generous man. Too bad he just couldn't leave the booze alone. The book is marred by a horrible job (if any was done at all) of copy-editing, with lots of spelling and grammatical errors, often with awkward phrasing that conveys a meaning opposite of what was intended.

Mary says

Nothing new here- just another show biz bio of wasted talent.

Tara says

Good, but very short. Things that usually would have been given more time in a star biography were just mentioned in passing.

Don Berryhill says

Real m a n

You never knew how sad people of fame lives are so high and so low. Eternity is a long time to live in regret.

Surreysmum says

This biography of Richard Burton is, I would guess, highly unreliable as to details. Although Michael Munn, the author, was indeed in the entertainment business in minor capacities, I very much doubt he had the kind of access to Burton himself (or to his circle) that would allow him to quote, apparently verbatim, whole stretches of actual conversation so very focused and illuminating about Burton's life. My suspicion that in fact Munn was paraphrasing cribbed versions of secondary sources was confirmed when I compared his account of an incident involving John Gielgud with Sheridan Morley's Gielgud biography, and discovered word-for-word-borrowings but written as if told to the author directly by Burton (the tip-off was the idiosyncratic phrase "idiot boards"). That said, Munn does seem to have had some access to Burton (though not perhaps in the chummy way he claims), as well as to some of the more notorious gossips in Hollywood like Roddy McDowall. He also actually gives us a bibliography of sorts, though only a "selected" one; so I suspect he did his reading.

This, then, was a quick read with a hefty dose of salt, reliable for at least the bare outlines of Burton's career, and likely also a pretty good reflection of the gossip about Burton over the years. It's not a very happy tale. Indeed, given whatever illness of the mind (or brain) he was suffering from, as well as his lifelong alcoholism, what strikes me about Burton is not the brevity of his working life but the fact that he managed to get as much good work done as he did.

I was relieved to read that despite his reputation of having slept with every leading lady he had, Julie Andrews (who shared the stage with him in "Camelot") was notoriously proof against his boozy charms.

There's got to be at least one better biography out there, and I remember hearing that Burton's own diaries have been published, so I may come back to him at some point. I'm really far more interested in Peter O'Toole (upon the subject of whom this particular book was pretty light, though apparently they were quite good friends), but reading this book has at least revived in me the desire to go back and watch "Becket" again.

Cheryl Seymour says

This book is a fairly good biography of Richard Burton's life. The author claims to have known Burton from 1968 to 1984. Most of the book appears to be taken from stories about Burton that other actors or Burton himself told. Gossip is the only real term that can be attributed to the stories. Still, it is a fascinating read for people who like to read about actors and actresses who dominated Hollywood. For a better biography on Richard Burton, I recommend Melvyn Bragg's book on Burton. Bragg uses excerpts from Richard Burton's diary giving readers a better insight into Burton than other biographies would.

Hanson says

I did enjoy this one. What a tumultuous life Burton had!

Belinda says

Arrgh! Can a sister get a good biography?? I have been hogging out on bios lately--not a new thing, probably a forever thing. I am rarely this disappointed this many times in succession. I have been continuing my obsession with Richard Burton and I came across this at the library and was pleased to have another Burton notch for my bedpost. I would have been better off finding the author and smacking him with the book. This is another hanger on biography by yet another hanger on who is just sure they knew the "real" Richard Burton. The fallacies in this book are even sadder by way of the fact that this man actually knew Burton. Sadly, he falls into the category that the author himself disdains (and ironically blames on poor Elizabeth Taylor) the hanger on with something to gain. Munn does not go the route of character assassination, he just goes the route of "I know a little...so I'll make up a lot". There are repeated stories (long since disproved) many of them negative towards Elizabeth Taylor (honestly can no one just accept that these 2 people loved each other to distraction? we can debate all day on whether they were good for each other but honestly--they loved each other--get over it!).

There is an especially interesting discussion on whether Burton was gay (he was not) and all the ways that he behaved and every speck of gossip that hinted that he was--it was a confusing way to write about it--despite reeling off all of the reasons Burton was not gay, you get the feeling the author wishes he had been and sort

of references it in a wishful kind of a way. Personally I don't find it that interesting--I don't think he's the type of guy who would have hidden it and he voraciously adored women....nuff said. No need to name drop John Gielgud 20 times. Just badly written, full of personal anecdotes about people long dead who cannot defend themselves and badly sourced. Note to every one who knows someone famous--sometimes it's okay to just be their friend--you don't need to write a book about it.
